



SEAC

Introduction & Overview



What is an Advisory Council?

It is important to understand the distinction between “advisory” and “governing” boards, councils, and committees.

- Advisory, in terms of committees, means having or exercising power to advise. Advice may be defined as opinion about what could or should be done about a situation or problem or as a proposal for an appropriate course of action counsel.
- Advisory groups provide guidance rather than governance.
- Advisory groups do not have any formal authority to issue directives. They do not set policy but may make recommendations regarding policy. The advice may or may not be heeded by the board, which has the decision-making authority.



The question naturally arises, “If someone else is still going to make all the decisions, what difference does my involvement on the SEAC make?”

- Advice and recommendations can and should influence decision making and policymaking by the formal board members.
- Contributions of the advisory members, who have personal experience as well as unique knowledge and skills in a particular area, serve to complement the knowledge and skills of the formal board members as they make decisions regarding related policy.



Advisory groups are not:

- *Boards of directors:* Individuals who have legal liability and statutory and financial responsibility to stakeholders and constituents, and maintain organizational control
- *User groups:* Consumers organized to provide input regarding specific services or products
- *Focus groups:* Individuals who meet specific demographic criteria and are brought together by the organization to discuss or evaluate a particular topic



SEACs give advice or provide guidance to the school board in different ways:

- The special education director may serve as a liaison carrying the advice and guidance of the advisory group to the school district administration and board of directors.
- A school board member may have an identified relationship to the SEAC, bringing requests for guidance to the SEAC and taking its advice and recommendations back to the school board.
- The SEAC may provide recommendations directly to the board through written communication or through an in-person presentation to the board.



Benefits of an effective SEAC to parent members

- Knowledge gained about district programs and services may benefit their own or another family's child.
- Contributing to others may give added value and meaning to their own personal experience.
- Witnessing positive change as a result of their input and influence is rewarding and motivating.
- They learn new skills that may transfer to other areas of advocacy and leadership.
- They gain a big-picture perspective.
- They find opportunities to network and build relationships with other families with similar life experiences.
- They may develop positive and helpful relationships with school staff.



Benefits of an effective SEAC to professionals

- Viewing issues from a variety of perspectives may increase our effectiveness working with families and other staff.
- We gain a better understanding of the concerns and constraints of families and learn helpful ways to address them.
- We gain knowledge about various disabilities, programs, and resources beyond their own area of expertise.
- We make professional networking connections.
- We increase development of leadership and communication skills.



Mutual benefits of an effective SEAC

- Parents and school personnel gain more accurate and positive views about each other's attitudes, intentions and abilities.
- More parents are equipped to act as advocates for and supporters of public schools and programs.
- Parent input helps keep things real and relevant, which may result in more practical and identifiable outcomes.
- Members feel more invested in the school system.
- Parents can advocate for system and program change in ways that staff cannot.
- The presence and active participation of parents helps keep the focus of discussions on children, which may lead to more family-centered practices.
- Advice received and implemented by decision makers may lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.